



 North Kent Methodist Circuit

grapevine

CIRCUIT NEWS AND PREACHING PLAN



inside...

FAREWELL TO BONNI-BELLE
50TH ANNIVERSARY OF ST. DAVID'S
LARKFIELD'S WEEKEND AWAY

Issue Thirty Eight
Summer 2026

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At a recent property meeting at one of my churches (which shall remain anonymous...) I discovered that there is a specific

teaspoon kept in a specific location, for the purpose of changing the toilet roll in the gents' toilets. The true identity of said spoon is known only to a few people, and it reminded me of the sheer amount of work that is carried out in our churches without fanfare, and even without most of us being aware, so that everything happens as it should.

Without wishing to compare a Superintendent to a teaspoon... I am so aware, as we prepare to bid farewell to Bonni-Belle, of the enormous amount of work that she has carried out behind the scenes in our circuit, without fanfare or acknowledgement, to ensure the smooth-running of our churches. Much of the work of a Superintendent is not especially glamorous, but

Bonni-Belle has tackled a great deal relating to matters such as Safeguarding, property, compliance, and finance, to free up her fellow ministers for the work of serving the local churches. She has shouldered some of the most difficult tasks, as an act of sacrificial love, for her colleagues, for the members of this circuit, and for the Church.

At Hextable, over Lent, we thought about various spiritual disciplines. When we thought about fasting, we remembered how, in Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus tells his followers not to advertise the fact that they are hungry, "so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." God sees and honours that which is done quietly, faithfully, and without fanfare or acknowledgement.

This quarter, why not make a concerted effort to notice the work that goes on behind the scenes at

your local church? Those things that just 'happen' and, more importantly, the people that make them happen, quietly, faithfully, and as an act of service to God.

Please hold Bonni-Belle and Alfred in your prayers as they prepare for the next chapter of their life and ministry. As Bonni-Belle says in her article, this has not been the way she envisaged her final year in circuit ministry, but we pray that in her 'sitting down' (Methodist-speak for retirement) she will find rest, refreshment, and a great deal of joy.

Please pray for the circuit, too, during this time of transition, and especially for Rev Alex as she prepares to take on the role of Superintendent from September 2026. Thank you, Alex, and may God bless you in your new responsibilities.

**Every blessing,
Rev Naomi**

Those Winter Sundays

by Robert Hayden

*Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.*

*I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,*

*Speaking indifferently to him,
who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as well.
What did I know, what did I know
of love's austere and lonely offices?*

Also in this issue:

Bonni-Belle's farewell to North Kent!

50th Anniversary of St David's Methodist Church in Lordswood

Larkfield's church weekend away: 'A love that will grow'

Farewell to North Kent!



It's hard to believe this is the last time I'll be writing for Grapevine! When I arrived in the N Kent circuit in September 2015,

Lynn Rainer and I were still trying to pull together a monthly 'circuit newsletter' which was raising more frustration than satisfaction. Within a few months, we'd decided to try a circuit magazine, and with the able help of Gillian Collins (who suggested the Grapevine title) and Paul Skipp (always able to pull just the right cover photos and layout design from his bag of magic tricks), we were on our way with a new quarterly format. Initially I wondered where all the 'copy' (contents) would come from, but the Lord and the churches have supplied abundantly, and I feel good knowing that Naomi Oates will be continuing with this effort over the coming year.

Many years ago in S India, there was a banner hung in our church which read: "The sign of God's leading is that we find ourselves in places we hadn't imagined." Back then, I certainly hadn't imagined that I would end up as a British Methodist Minister (I was a Missionary with the United Methodist Church then but not ordained). And I knew next to nothing about Kent. But I've learned a lot in my 11 years in N Kent, and together we've been stretched to find new ways to minister to and with each other that none of us could have imagined.

Of course, I started as one of three co-supers, then as Gary Watt and Tony Graff moved on to serve in other places and positions, I found myself as the sole super for the circuit. It became apparent that I needed to relinquish pastoral responsibility for Tonbridge Road and Bearsted at that point, especially as preparations for the renovation work at Union Street loomed large, and the Chinese congregation needed some extra oversight as well. My main goal as super has been to ensure that everything is working well so that my ministerial and lay colleagues have the resources they need to do their own ministries in the local churches and communities.

Indeed, it's been a great joy to have worked with more than a dozen ministerial colleagues and nearly that many supernumerary colleagues - as well as nearly twenty lay employees - in my time in N Kent. Each has brought their special gifts and challenges. Having regular Reflective Supervision sessions in place for each has been a valuable opportunity for all of my colleagues and me. Working alongside a regularly changing set of Circuit Stewards has also been a gift and at times a challenge! My life verse from 2 Corinthians 4 has often come in handy: "God in God's mercy has given us this work to do and so we do not become discouraged."

Once I became the sole super, I also made every effort to visit and lead worship in every church in the circuit,

though making that happen with a large number of churches has been another challenge! Thank you each for making me welcome and sharing something of yourselves with me. I have learned much from each of you.

COVID also taught us much about how to connect with each other when we couldn't meet with each other in person. The online Circuit Services have been going on for over six years now, and I've especially appreciated them these past few months when my own health limitations have been I had to stay at home to worship and do my ministry.

Indeed, the health restrictions of these past several months have been a new challenge: it's certainly not how I had envisioned serving in my last year of active ministry - and so another instance of God sending me to a 'place' which I hadn't anticipated. I am deeply grateful for the outpouring of love and support that has come my way since my diagnosis of endometrial cancer in December and subsequent radical hysterectomy and chemo and radiotherapy regimens. I am particularly indebted to Alex Terrett, Naomi Oates, and James Walker for covering for me in many circumstances.

And where might God be sending me next? My best guess at this time of writing is that Alfred and I will be moving in the summer to housing arranged through the Methodist

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Ministers' Housing Society in Hemel Hempstead. Indeed, as we were leaving one of the (15) places houses we visited over recent months, we caught sight of a sign pointing the way to Hemel Hempstead Methodist Church. When we stopped by for a quick visit, we were warmly welcomed by a group of women just finishing up their morning meeting and starting to lock up the church for lunch. In true Methodist style, they immediately showed us around the premises, handed us the church notice sheet, and told us about all the activities that take place during the week. I also realised that a dear woman minister friend of mine lives in Hemel Hempstead, so I'll have a friend in that new place as well!

A few verses after the 2 Cor 4 text I quoted earlier, there is a promise that though we will often be required to lay aside houses and family and responsibilities for God's Kingdom work, we will never be without a friend.

As I write this, we are also unsure of who will be taking on which responsibilities within the circuit after I leave. When I first arrived, the circuit had been newly formed, and there were many challenges to face about how the various areas and congregations would work together. Looking back, some of those challenges still exist, and other challenges have been creatively and successfully addressed. Again, *the sign of God's leading is that we find ourselves in a place we didn't intend to go.* Above all, that tells me that when we are working for God's kingdom, we must be ready to continually adapt to new situations and challenges - and in the knowledge that God journeys with us towards to place we need to be. So be it with us. **Amen!**

Bonni-Belle



50th Anniversary Methodist Church

St David's Church is 50! How did we ever survive that long, and, you may be thinking, who and where is St David's anyway? A good question!

More than 55 years ago there was a Methodist local preacher - Stan Darrell - working in the Primitive Methodist Hall on Princes Avenue, and an Anglican priest - Ted Francis - at the St James' Mission Chapel in Walderslade Village. They became good friends being, as they were, only several hundred yards apart. It was at the time the Anglicans and Methodists were discussing whether to join the two denominations together, and Ted and Stan had a vision for a shared church in this developing area south of Chatham.

As a result St William's Walderslade was born using funds from the Anglican church and the selling of bricks at 50p a time, the congregations combined and so did the ministers. An official agreement with a sponsoring body had to be set up complete with quotas to ensure fairness and even a 'pre-nup' agreement on how to split up if it all went wrong! We are now designated an LEP (local ecumenical partnership)

At that time, a mile or so away, Lordswood was being carved out from among the trees, adding to the old Naval estate. Though close it was separated by a 15% hill (1 in 7 in old money!) and no public transport between the two areas. Clearly another church was needed and so St David's came into being, this time funded largely by the Methodist church as well as fund raising by the indefatigable St William's congregation.

Now known at 'The United Churches of St William's, Walderslade and St David's Lordswood' (a name

that trips off the tongue!) the two congregations grew together and bickered happily like all siblings. In time the closeness between the denominations even meant the old service books were swapped for a hybrid version containing elements of both. Meanwhile, in the outside world, the hierarchies of both Anglicans and Methodists had decided the obstacles were insurmountable and they would not be merging.

By this time the regular oversight by our sponsoring body was due - well, 14 years overdue - and they were horrified. We were neither Anglican nor Methodist but a mixture, and needed to find ways of 'recovering our separate identities'. Out went the shared service, in came denominationally appropriate ones and the congregation blinked and thought 'what's that all about?'

We'd started with an Anglican minister and a Methodist Local Preacher, later a Presbyterian, across the two churches. As financial and personnel problems developed that dropped to an Anglican and a shared Methodist minister. Sometimes a curate was brought in to help out. Then we were asked to merge with St Alban's, Blue Bell Hill. That's when the name changed. If our original one was clumsy then adding another name seemed worse, so we thought about it and ended up as Holy Trinity (three churches - geddit?) South Chatham. Don't look for South Chatham on the map - as an area it doesn't actually exist!

And now St David's, the second but also the youngest of the three, is 50. We still don't really know the difference between Anglican and Methodist if we ever think about it. We're just Christians, with the usual shortage of money, largely elderly

of St David's in Lordswood

congregation, and struggling with all the bureaucracy that increasingly falls on all charities. But we're here. We still want to serve God by serving our community in all the ways we can in spite of all our limitations. In the words of the old hymn 'Tis grace hath brought us safe thus far and grace will lead us home.'

And amen to that.

Sylvia Wrigglesworth (Church Warden)

St David's celebrates its 50th Anniversary with a special service on Sunday 10 May 2026



Larkfield's church weekend away: 'A love that will grow'



Way back in April 2025, at Larkfield's General Church Meeting, we became aware of some exciting opportunities facing our church. First, that a number of people 'on the fringes' were asking deep questions about faith; and second, that although we often see ourselves as a small church, between all our various services and activities, our extended church family includes a couple of hundred people. So, we decided to hold an Alpha Course (which you can read about in the previous Grapevine) and a church weekend away, with a view to enabling folks from different parts of the life of the church to get to know each other, and to explore some of the basics of the Christian faith together.

The church weekend away took place in January/February 2026, at Ashburnham Place near Battle. Our theme was 'A love that will grow' (based on Philippians 1), and we explored that theme with sessions on growing in the Holy Spirit; growing

into our purpose; growing in confidence as we talk about our faith; and growing as a church. We also explored the extensive (and rather damp!) grounds, met the resident chickens and rabbits, enjoyed some excellent hospitality, and made towers out of marshmallows and dry spaghetti. The young people who joined us had some parallel sessions especially for them - although, by Sunday morning, they were all too sleepy to join in! One highlight was the workshops on Saturday evening - some people wrote creative prayers, others crafted a new hymn about the experience of the weekend away, others learned a worship dance with flags, and still others studied the Bible together. On Sunday morning, the fruits of these workshops became our joy-filled communion service, shaped by every person there.

We are extremely grateful that, by the grace of God, the weekend away fulfilled the aims we had established back in April 2025. It provided an

opportunity for people to come together from all areas of the life of the church - from our 10am services, Brigades, Breakfast Church, Messy Church, Chuckles, Muffins, the Welcome Hub, Expressions Dance, Knitting & Craft, and so on. It also provided an opportunity for various people to take the next step in their faith journey - studying the Bible for the first time, leading worship for the first time, or seeking baptism.

We are also hugely grateful to the circuit and district, for providing grant funding that enabled us to offer the weekend away on a 'pay as you can' basis, meaning that no-one was prevented from attending by a lack of funds. It was so important to us that the church weekend away was accessible to everyone involved in the life of the church.

One final expression of gratitude - to the planning team, Monica, Valerie, Claire and Stefan, and the prayer team, Alan, Tracy and Sylvia, plus all

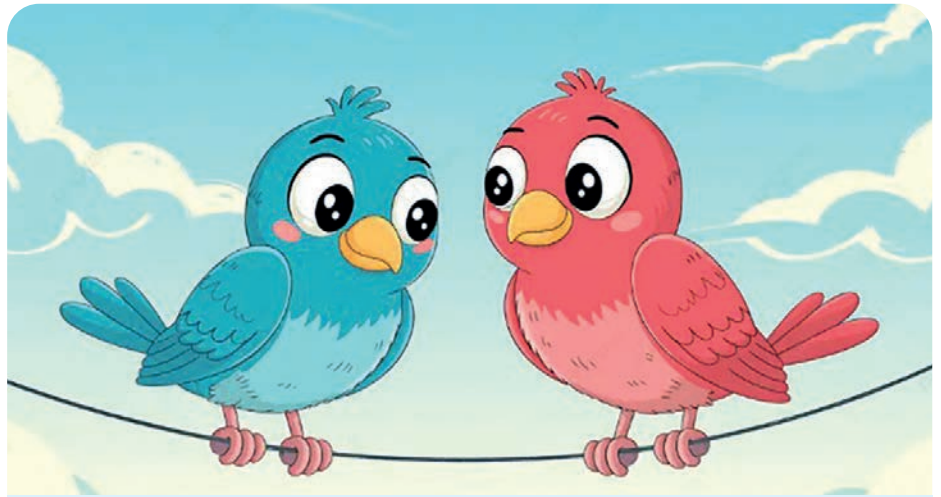




those who led sessions and worship at the weekend itself. Each person made a vital and invaluable contribution.

So, what next? How do we continue to grow together as a church family, and to go deeper in faith? Well, during Alpha and the church weekend away, a number of people expressed a desire to understand the Bible better, and to grow in confidence reading the Bible. So we plan to run The Bible Course on Saturday mornings, beginning on 25 April. This eight-week course is designed to help people get to grips with the story, characters and context of the Bible. We'll let you know how it goes!

Rev Naomi



Two birds telling the story of the raising of Lazarus

Coo, what's occurring?

Caw, Well Lazarus died

Coo, which one was he?

Caw, the one who left out bread at number 27

Coo, that's a shame, will have to go and find something to nibble elsewhere

Caw, it was all a bit strange

Coo, how so?

Caw, Well Martha and Mary, sent a messenger to find Jesus

Coo, why?

Caw, well he was Lazarus' best mate, and they thought he ought to know.

Coo, yes, I spose he would be sad

Caw, well he didn't come when they sent for him

Coo, Rude or what!

Caw, then he turned up three days later

Coo, bet Martha and Mary were cross!

Caw, spitting feathers, so to speak

Coo, well at least he turned up in time for the wake

Caw, actually he missed that as well

Coo, not a good example to set

Caw, but when he arrived, he stood and wept with the rest of the mourners

Coo, emotion gets you like that

Caw, then he told them to roll away the stone in front of the tomb

Coo, poooh, I bet that smelt

Caw, as it happened it didn't

Coo, phew that was a miracle in itself

Caw, then Jesus called Lazarus out

Coo, ooooh, ghostly apparition

Caw, you are so theatrical

Coo, then what happened?

Caw, Lazarus came out of the tomb, wrapped in bandages

Coo, blue. Then?

Caw, he walked back home with Martha and Mary, followed by the redundant mourners and ate his own wake feast

Coo, so we are alright for snacks at number 27 again. That is excellent.

Kathy Skipp

North Kent Circuit

Preaching Plan June – August 2026

		JUNE				JULY				AUGUST				
		7	14	21	28	5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	30
BEARSTED	10.30	WEST	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	NEWELL	READ	LA	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	R GREY	LA	TROTT	WEST	LA	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	READ
CHINESE	13.30	CHAN <i>hc</i>	D LAI	CHAN	CHU	CHAN <i>hc</i>	LA <i>aa</i>	S LAI	LAU	CHAN <i>hc</i>	WONG	NGUANG	TSUI	HII
DENE HOLM	11.00	LA	ROWE	LA	LA	LA	WATTON	TERRETT	LA	TERRETT <i>US @ Gravesend</i>	CHAN <i>US @ Spital Street</i>	TERRETT <i>Seaside Trip</i>	TERRETT <i>US @ The Brent</i>	TERRETT <i>US @ Dene Holm</i>
ECCLES	10.30	WILDING	LA	LA	LA	NEWELL	SHEPHERD	LA	WILDING	LA	LA	LA	LA	LA
GRAVESEND	11.00	LA	DOWNES	S SMITH	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	LA	ROWE	LA	GRAY	TERRETT <i>US @ Gravesend</i>	CHAN <i>US @ Spital Street</i>	TERRETT <i>Seaside Trip</i>	TERRETT <i>US @ The Brent</i>	TERRETT <i>US @ Dene Holm</i>
HARTLIP	18.30	GALLAGHER	LE GRYS <i>ca</i>	SELMES <i>hc</i>	GERMAN	GERMAN	SELMES <i>hc</i>	10-30AM	LA	SELMES <i>hc</i>	LA	LA	GERMAN	LA @ <i>St. Michaels</i>
HEXTABLE	10.30	LA	9am <i>bc</i> LA	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	LA	LA	9am <i>bc</i> SELMES <i>ca hc</i>	PATERSON	ROWE	S SMITH	LA	GRAY	PATERSON	S SMITH
HOLY TRINITY	10.00	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. Williams hc</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. Albans mw</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. Davids hc aa</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. Williams hc</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. Albans mw</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. Davids hc</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. Williams mw</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. Albans hc</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. Davids hc</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. Williams hc</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. Albans mw</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. Davids hc</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. Williams hc</i>
HOPE STREET	10.30	LE MASONRY	CASSELL	LE MASONRY <i>hc</i>	LE MASONRY	ZACHAR	LE MASONRY <i>Sea Sunday</i>	LE MASONRY <i>hc</i>	THOMPSON	ZACHAR	LA	LE MASONRY <i>hc</i>	GREGORY	LA
KINGSWOOD	11.00		MYLES					MYLES			MYLES			
LARKFIELD	10.00	9am <i>bc</i> LA	WATTON	WILDING	9am <i>bc</i> LA	9am <i>bc</i>	S SMITH	NEWELL	SHEPHERD	READ <i>hc</i>	LA	LA	LA	WILDING
	Café 15.00		LARKFIELD WILDING	BURHAM RAWLINS			LARKFIELD WILDING	BURHAM RAWLINS			LARKFIELD WILDING			
NEWINGTON	9.30	STUNELL	LA	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	ADOFO	M SMITH	LA	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	CAN- TAMAKLOE	WATTON	M SMITH	LA	ADOFO	M SMITH
PENINSULA STROOD	10.30	LA	HARRIS <i>aa</i>	TROTT	SELMES <i>hc</i>	WATTON	<i>aa</i>	HARRIS	SELMES <i>hc</i>	LA	LA	LA	LA	<i>US @ St. Lukes hc</i>
ST. LUKE'S	10.00	WOODHOUSE <i>ca</i>	SELMES <i>hc</i>	LA	STUNELL	LA <i>aa</i>	CHAN <i>hc</i>	LA	GALLAGHER	LA	ADOFO	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	WILLING	SELMES <i>hc us</i>
SITTINGBOURNE	10.30	ZACHAR <i>hs hc</i>	ADOFO	LA	ZACHAR	COHEN	ADOFO	M SMITH	ZACHAR	STUNELL	LA	HARRIS	TROTT	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>
SPITAL STREET	10.30	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	CHAN <i>hc</i>	PICKARD	LA	CHAN	GRAY	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	CHAN	TERRETT <i>US @ Gravesend</i>	CHAN <i>US @ Spital Street</i>	TERRETT <i>Seaside Trip</i>	TERRETT <i>US @ The Brent</i>	TERRETT <i>US @ Dene Holm</i>
STOKE	18.30		STUNELL				STUNELL				STUNELL			
THE BRENT	10.30	GRAY	LA	LA	PATERSON	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	LA	DOWNES	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	TERRETT <i>US @ Gravesend</i>	CHAN <i>US @ Spital Street</i>	TERRETT <i>Seaside Trip</i>	TERRETT <i>US @ The Brent</i>	TERRETT <i>US @ Dene Holm</i>
THIRD AVENUE	10.30	SELMES	LA	SELMES <i>hc</i>	CHAN <i>ca</i>	SELMES <i>sss</i>	WILLING <i>sss</i>	SELMES <i>sss hc</i>	LA <i>aa</i>	SELMES <i>sss</i>	WATTON <i>sss</i>	WILLING <i>sss</i>	SELMES <i>sss</i>	ROBB <i>sss</i>
TONBRIDGE RD	10.30	OATES <i>hc</i>	R GREY	SHEPHERD	LA	WEST <i>hc</i>	LA	TERRETT/ GRAFF <i>Farewell Ser.</i>	LA	LA	LA	SHEPHERD	LA	LA
UNION STREET	10.30	AT WEEK ST. URC	PICKARD <i>hc</i>	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT WEEK ST. URC	PICKARD	<i>Farewell Ser. @ Ton. Road</i>	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT WEEK ST. URC
ONLINE SERVICES	10.30	PICKARD	WALDOCK	HEXTABLE	THIRD AVE	PICKARD	WALDOCK	HEXTABLE	THIRD AVE	PICKARD	WALDOCK	HEXTABLE	THIRD AVE	HUDSON-BEDDOWS

aa All-age / *bc* Breakfast Church / *ca* Church Anniversary / *hc* Holy Communion
hs Healing Service / *mw* Morning Worship / *sss* Summer Sermon Series / *us* United Service

For the Autumn issue: Please send contributions as a Word document, no longer than 500 words, to naomi.oates@methodist.org.uk to arrive by 6th June 2026. If you can, please attach a suitable high quality image, but do not embed it in a document.

